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ABSTRACT

Based on a study of the book collection of Columbia-Greene Community College Library (New York) carried out in the summer of 1987, this report investigates the relationship of age and previous use to the future use of books. An examination of the acquisition year and circulation records of 10% of the library's book collection (approximately 4,000 books) indicates that, depending on the method of computing circulation, new books are circulated three, five, or six times as often as older books, and that new scientific and technical books are not circulated more frequently than new books on general subjects. In addition, an examination of the circulation records of 555 books purchased in 1977 and 1978 reveals that 70% of the books circulated in the year after acquisition were circulated at least once more in the next two years, while only 36% of the books not circulated in the year after acquisition were circulated at least once in the next two years, indicating a two-to-one preference for previously used books. Study results are depicted in four graphs. (KM)

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NEW BOOKS, AND THOSE PREVIOUSLY USED, LEAD THE BAND, BY A LOT.

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New Books, And Those Previously Used, Lead The Band, By A Lot

by Harold Ettelt

I've always believed that age and previous use were predictors of future use, but I couldn't be absolutely sure of that. Some things I believe turn out not to be so. And even if it were so, by how much is it so? So I measured it.

In Summer 1987, with the help of some industrious student aides, I took a ten percent arithmetic sample of the entire circulating collection. In all, about 4000 books were sampled with the acquisition year and circulation record of each recorded. This is a partial analysis of that data.

C-GCC is a comprehensive community college with about 40% of our circulation being to members of the general public. Our present bookstock is roughly 42,000 and our book circulation hit approximately 20,000 in 1976 and has stayed there since. The collection has never been weeded.

New Books Circulate More, Lots More

Depending on how you count it, new books circulate 3, 5, or 6 times as often as old books, as reflected in the accompanying graphs.

Graph #1 simply shows the percent of books acquired each year that were circulated at least once in calendar year 1986. While not a smooth curve, the trend is clear and the brand new books circulate roughly three times as often as older ones. The descent is steepest in the first ten years.

Graph #2 takes into account multiple circulations of the same book. If, for example, we had 100 books and the 40 that circulated did so a total of 75 times (some twice, three times, etc.), then the average use per book would be 75/100 or .75. Again new books do best, in fact, roughly five times better, but this time the descent is both more steep and more rapid.

Graph #3 is simply another way of taking into account multiple circulations. It simply counts them and shows the percent acquired each year that experienced multiple circulations in 1986. Thus 24% means that 24 out of every hundred were used more than once in 1986. The range here runs from a high of 24% for brand new books to a low of 3 or 4% for old books. Thus new books are six times as likely to experience repeat circulation.

Graph #4 attempts to answer whether this new book phenomenum is restricted to scientific and technical books (L.C. classes Q-T), or is a more general thing. The graph shows it is general.

In each of the first three graphs, the 1986 books lead the pack, even though they were purchased during 1986 and thus did not have the entire year in which to circulate. I would be tempted to ascribe this to the fact that we display new books, but the 1985 acquisitions do nearly as well and they are treated exactly the same as all other books. I can only conclude that patrons not only prefer new books,

but are capable of discerning which ones they are. Since we enclose all books in plastic wrappers with their dustjackets intact, that is pretty sophisticated. The drop in the 1986 books in graph #4 is easily explained. This graph shows use for the last 2½ years and the 1986 books had <u>at most</u> only 1½ years in which to be used. The wonder is the drop was not greater.

Previously Used Books Circulate More

I attempted to determine if, and by how much, previous circulation predicted future circulation. This is a lot harder to measure so I used a smaller sample that included only those books purchased in 1977 or 1978 (555 books). I disregarded use in the year of purchase to avoid any possible effects of new book displays. Then I simply divided the books into two groups (1) those that circulated at least once in the year following acquisition-243 books (2) those not so circulated-312 books. I then compared their circulation in the following two years. The results show a two-to-one preference for previously used books.

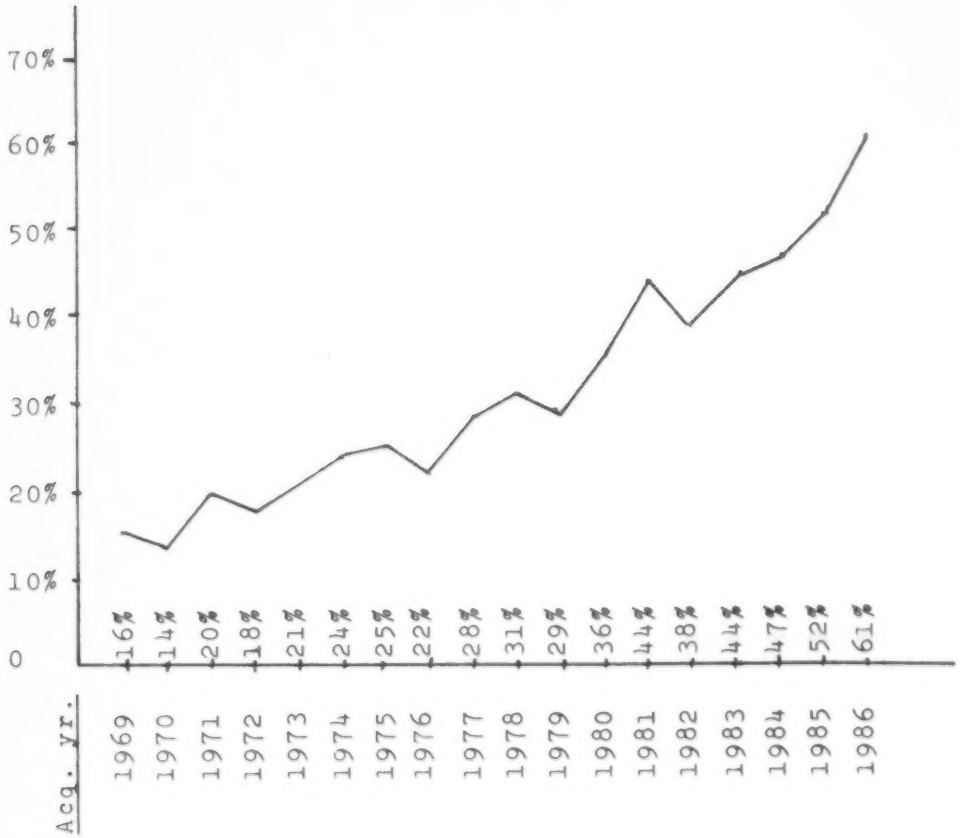
> 70% of those circulated in the year after acquisition were circulated at least once more in the next two years
>
> 36% of those <u>not</u> circulated in the year after acquisition were circulated at least once in the next two years.

There was not much difference in the two acquisition years taken singly. For 1977 acquisitions the corresponding figures are 66% and 35%, while for 1978 books they are 74% and 38%.

I have no idea what use I'll make of all this. But it is nice to know something.

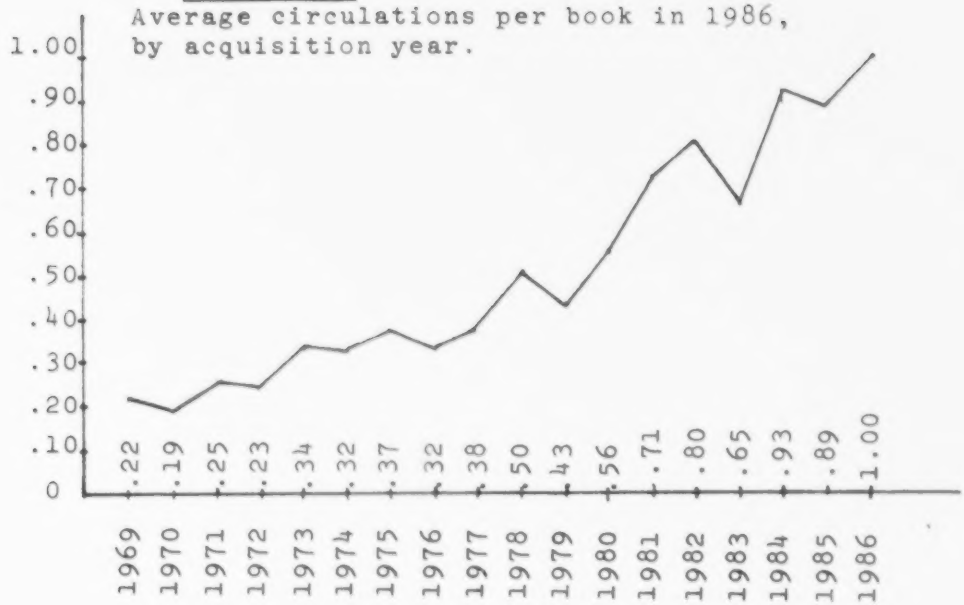
GRAPH # 1

Percent of books acquired each year that were used at least once in calendar year 1986. Based on ten percent sample of entire collection taken in Summer 1987.



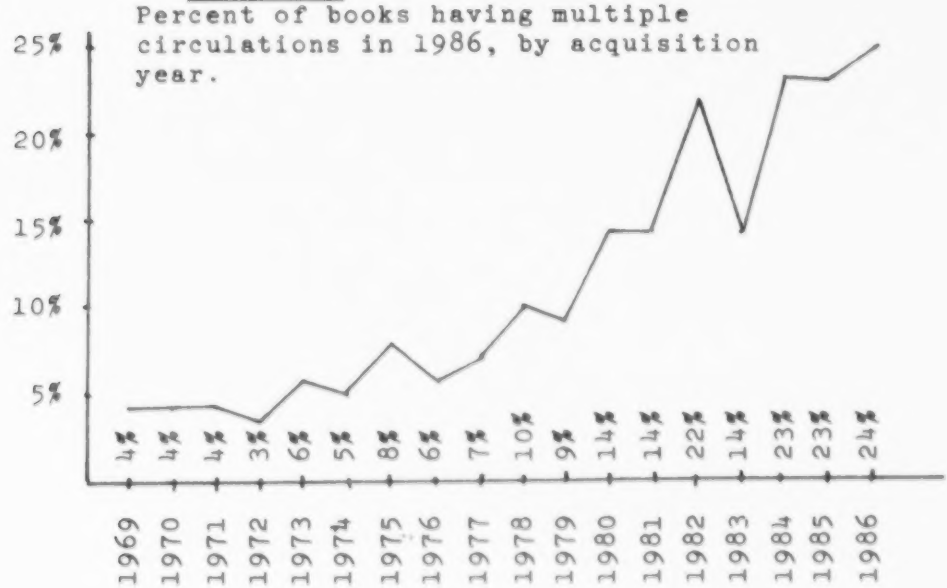
GRAPH # 2

Average circulations per book in 1986, by acquisition year.

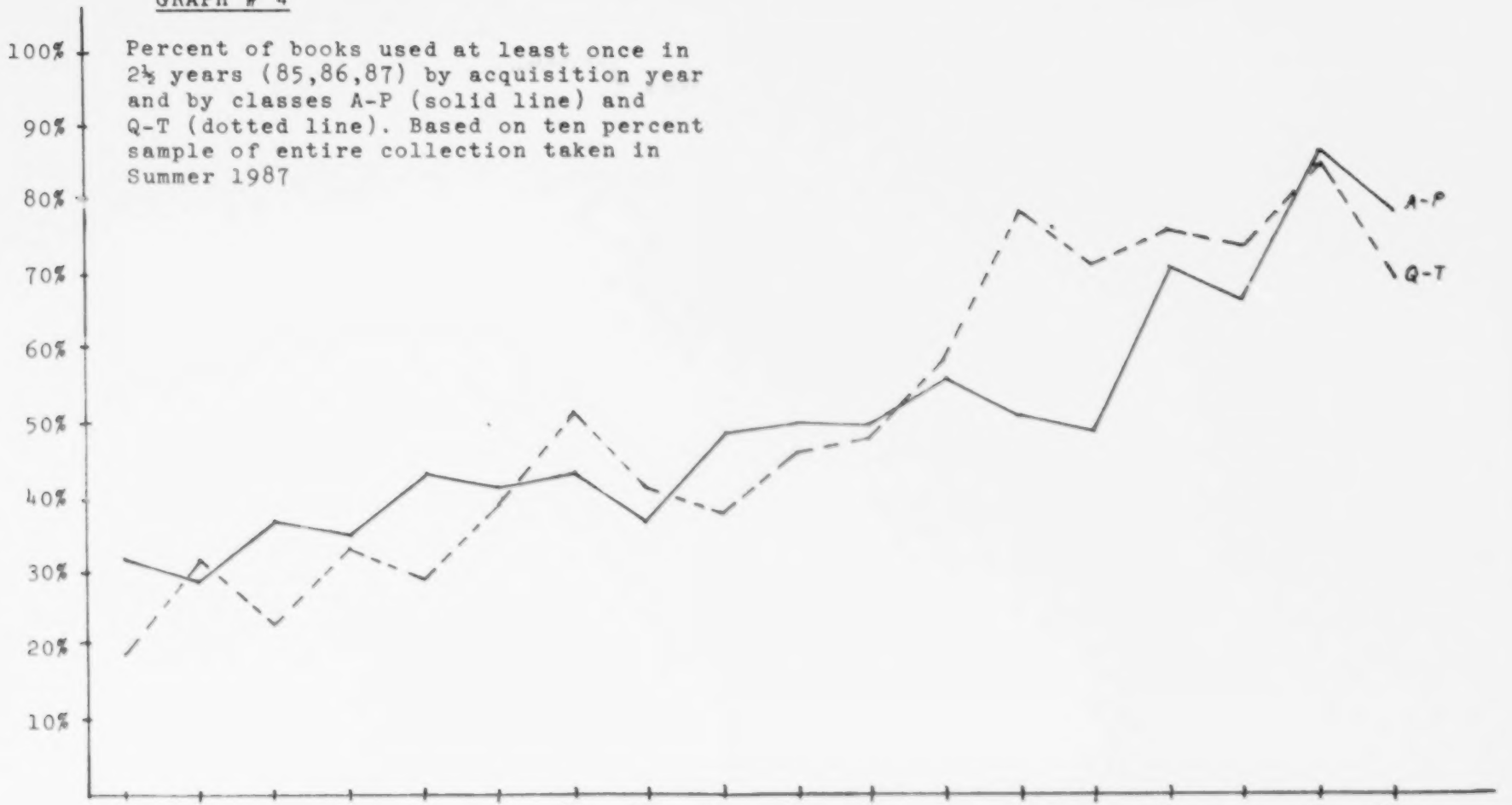


GRAPH # 3

Percent of books having multiple circulations in 1986, by acquisition year.



GRAPH # 4



	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
A-P	32%	29%	37%	35%	43%	42%	44%	37%	49%	50%	50%	56%	51%	49%	71%	67%	86%	78%
Q-T	19%	32%	23%	33%	29%	39%	52%	42%	38%	46%	48%	59%	79%	72%	76%	74%	85%	69%